



## **The American Round Table To Abolish Homelessness**

### **Statement for the Record**

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**President**

**American Round Table to Abolish Homelessness**

Committee on Energy and Commerce

Subcommittee on Health

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“Examining H.R. 2646, the Helping Families in Mental Health Crisis Act.”

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The American Round Table is pleased to provide this Statement for the Record to the Committee on Energy and Commerce, Subcommittee on Health on the occasion of the hearing on H.R. 2646, the *Helping Families in Mental Health Crisis Act*, introduced by Representatives Tim Murphy (PA) and Eddie Bernice Johnson (TX).

During the 113<sup>th</sup> Congress, the Health Subcommittee and the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee undertook important investigative work on the issue of serious mental illness in hearings and other settings. The proposed legislation [H.R. 3717] that resulted contained important new provisions but lacked needed recognition of the issue of homelessness.

The Round Table engaged Chairman Murphy and his staff and other Committee members to remedy this gap. Chairman Murphy heard our concerns and revised the new bill to be more reflective of the needs of our most vulnerable and most disabled neighbors who are mentally ill and living in shelters and languishing on the streets of our country. This more specific reach into the lives of people who are homeless and proposals to increase their access to evidence-based treatment – as well as recognition of their need for targeted and comprehensive services - will ensure that crucial mental health resources are focused on those most in need of them. ~more

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Ensuring that mental health services are targeted to homeless people will provide needed resources for those who engage the most disabled in their most extreme circumstances. The American Round Table to Abolish Homelessness affirms that the new iteration of the bill is far more responsive and sensitive to the needs of our poorest and most disabled citizens.

The American Round Table to Abolish Homelessness works with communities across the country to upgrade their response in ending homelessness, specifically working with elected and appointed officials, provider agencies, and, most importantly, consumers.

The Round Table is committed to strategies to end homelessness that are research and data driven, performance-based, consumer-centric, and results-oriented and to the rapid dissemination of innovation, information, and inspiration to our partners. Our work is governed by the single metric of ending homelessness, especially the long-term homelessness of our most vulnerable and disabled neighbors living on the streets and languishing in shelters. We are committed to the philosophy and practice of a sense of belonging in the community for people who have experienced homelessness.

Cost studies across the nation have established that the chronically homeless population is at highest risk of death and is most costly to the public purse in its use of public and private services in health care, emergency response, local police and jails, and behavioral health.

The Round Table seeks to scale “what works” to end homelessness, and we endeavor to identify “Next Practices” that are future-focused and represent the next generation of innovations to end homelessness. The proposed adoption of a federal standard of evidence-based practices for treatment in this legislation is an important step forward and will advance the established use of Housing First and CTI for people who are homeless. We believe that identifying future focused Next Practices is important in advancing new strategies and technologies that achieve results.

H.R. 2646, the Helping Families in Mental Health Crisis Act, provides much needed and increased visibility to people who are homeless and living with mental illness, focuses on data and outcomes that have been crucial in achieving results in ending homelessness, emphasizes effectiveness in targeting and reaching homeless people, and underscores the fundamental goal of reducing homelessness.

Recent national data on homelessness collected in local communities demonstrates the importance of this legislation for individuals who are homeless and living with serious mental illness. Of the 13 percent of people who experience long-term or chronic homelessness – individuals who have been the focus of the Federal goal to end chronic homelessness ~more

since 2002 -more than 80 percent struggle with some combination of mental illness, addiction, and major medical ailments.

Access to treatment and the central antidote to homelessness of permanent housing - in the form of the cost-effective and evidence based innovation of Housing First - are the solution to end homelessness and create a trajectory of recovery.

We support efforts to expand the provision of evidence-based mental health services necessary for the well-being of individuals with serious mental illness who receive treatment through the community mental health system, an integrated behavioral health and primary care network, or an in-patient setting. We also support the use of Assisted Outpatient Treatment which has been shown to reduce homelessness, end the random ricocheting of individuals through expensive crisis systems, and reduce costs to the taxpayer in the use of acute and emergency services, including law enforcement.

Comprehensive mental health reforms, such as those proposed, deserve attention by a broad range of stakeholders. All will be important for our most vulnerable neighbors in seeking stability, an end to their homelessness, and a future of recovery and integration in the community. Each element focused on homelessness will improve the service delivery system and advance treatment and recovery. The use of peers in service delivery and the recognition of the role of increased rates of employment and enrollment in educational and vocational programs are key to promoting recovery and a life in the community.

The Round Table is committed to working with mental health leaders in Congress to forward this bill. Access to treatment and the central antidote to homelessness of permanent housing - in the form of the cost-effective and evidence- based innovation of Housing First - are the solution to end homelessness and create a trajectory of recovery.